



Medicine Bow National Forest Landscape Vegetation Analysis (LaVA) Project Facts

March 2018



Why Here and Why Now?

- The Forest Service has conducted vegetation management activities for more than a decade to mitigate the effects of bark beetle epidemic plaguing the Medicine Bow National Forest (MBNF) since the late 1990s. While much work has been accomplished, there is still much to do.
- 2016 aerial survey data shows roughly 89% of the forested acres on the Snowy Range (369,260 of 412,721 acres) and 79% of the Sierra Madre (190,522 of 240,139 acres) have been impacted by the epidemic.
- This situation has been a topic of concern with the public, permittees and partners across all national forest resource programs. These conversations led to the idea of the Landscape Vegetation Analysis (LaVA).
- Opportunity to work with cooperating agencies and partners on an extensive scale to improve conditions on the forest for a variety of uses and users.
- By using the LaVA decision as a NEPA baseline for vegetation management over the next 10-15 years, efficiency in analysis can be achieved to match rapidly changing conditions on the ground.

What and Where is LaVA Project?

- **Analysis Area** encompasses the entire Snowy Range and Sierra Madre mountain ranges and includes roughly **850,000 acres** of National Forest System (NFS) lands. It is located in Albany and Carbon Counties, Wyoming.
- LaVA is a landscape-scale proposal to accelerate the pace and scale of active forest restoration using a wide range of tools, including tree thinning, harvest, and hazard removal, as well as prescribed burning in the Sierra Madre and Snowy Ranges of the MBNF.
- Public involvement for the LaVA Project was initiated in July of 2017. Public involvement activities included publishing a Notice of Intent in the Federal Register; mailing project information to 1,200 individuals and groups; posting information on MBNF project webpage; publishing project news releases; and hosting public meetings in Laramie and Saratoga.
- **Project Goals** include, but are not limited to: providing for human safety; reducing wildfire risk to communities, infrastructure, and municipal water supplies; using tree cutting and/or prescribed burning to: make areas more resilient to future disturbance; restore, and enhance forest ecosystem components; supply forest products to local industries; and improve, protect, and restore wildlife habitat.
- Large-scale analysis will provide a Project with a anticipated life of 10-15 years.
- The LaVA uses the Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA) which provides for expedited environmental analysis and treatments to address areas affected by insect and disease infestations. The HFRA allows for a narrower range of alternatives and faster objection processes; it does not shortcut public involvement in any way.

What is the Proposed Action?

- The Forest Service has been cooperating with numerous state and federal agencies since March of 2017 to develop the LaVA Proposed Action. This collaborative effort and comments received during Project Scoping have resulted in the project proposal:
 - Stand initiating or even-aged treatment methods that would not exceed **95,000 acres**.
 - Uneven-aged or intermediate treatments that would not exceed **165,000 acres**.
 - Other vegetation treatments that would not exceed **100,000 acres**.
 - For a total that would not exceed **360,000 acres** over the next 10-15 years.
- The project total equates to roughly 30% of the Medicine Bow National Forest.





LaVA Project Facts

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Proposed Information Continued

- The proposed action is a subset of the 1.2 million total acres on the MBNF, the 850,000 acres of the Sierra Madre and Snowy Range mountain ranges, and within the 613,118 acres identified as the treatment opportunity area.
- The proposal also includes prescribed fire and tree cutting in inventoried roadless areas (IRAs) and includes up to 600 miles of temporary roads to access treatment areas. No temporary road construction would occur in IRAs.
- *Not all of the Proposed Action acres would be treated over the life of the project, as some acres will be eliminated due to on-the-ground resource conditions (e.g., steep slopes, wetlands, wildlife security areas) and operational feasibility.*
- **Treatment Opportunity Areas (TOAs)** represent the land base wherein the LaVA Proposed Action could be implemented. The TOAs align with direction in the Revised Medicine Bow National Forest Plan (Forest Plan 2003), identify the types of management activities that could be proposed in a particular area, and whether or not temporary road construction would be allowed.
- Certain locations within the analysis area, such as Wilderness Areas and portions of Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs), have been excluded from treatment opportunities under this proposed action. This has reduced the area wherein management activities could occur from approximately 850,000 acres to roughly **613,000 acres**. The 613,000 acres remaining have been identified as 'Treatment Opportunity Areas. (TOAs).'
- ◊ The LaVA Project includes four types of TOAs totaling 613,118 acres: Full Suite of Treatment Tools—No temporary roads (136,024 acres); Full Suite of Treatment Tools—With temporary roads (452,495 acres); Limited Suite of Treatment Tools—No temporary roads (13,970 acres); and Limited Suite of Treatment Tools—With temporary roads (10,628 acres).
- LaVA will be consistent with the Medicine Bow National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (2003).

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Information

- Traditional NEPA planning processes generally take 2-3 years and cannot keep pace with the extent of the mortality and the threats to values at risk. Therefore, a different planning approach is needed to address challenges and opportunities presented by the rapidly changing forest.
- The LaVA Project is utilizing a landscape-scale, condition-based planning approach in meeting the NEPA requirements while allowing for a broad-based analysis. It is designed to accelerate the pace and scale of active forest management on the MBNF over the next 10 – 15 years while responding to the unprecedented forest mortality in the management history of the MBNF.
- Condition-based NEPA is a new planning approach used to analyze a range of potential treatment opportunities over a broad landscape rather than analyzing site-specific treatment units. Environmental analyses are conducted using existing data sets, spatial layers, best available science information, and professional expertise. During project implementation, objectives and design of site-specific treatments are determined prior to any treatment activities using a series of field checklists developed as part of the analysis process.
- Condition-based NEPA results in a decision that is flexible, adaptive, and responsive to actual on-the-ground conditions.

Public Involvement

- The Forest Service initiated public involvement for the LaVA Project in July of 2017. Public involvement activities included publishing a Notice of Intent in the Federal Register; mailing project information to 1,200 individuals and groups; posting information on our project webpage; publishing project news releases; and hosting public meetings in Laramie and Saratoga.
- The Forest had received 58 comment letters from interested parties by the close of the comment period August 21, 2017.





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Public Involvement Continued

- The following information highlights the **unresolved conflicts** that were expressed during scoping and response to date.
 - ◊ **The Proposed Action lacks site-specificity.** The LaVA analysis area has been divided into Sub-Analysis Units (SAUs) that will be described in the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The SAUs will be used to increase site-specificity, in terms of describing current conditions, and to enhance our ability to disclose analysis effects. During project implementation, site-specificity will be further enhanced through the use of project design criteria and completion of field checklists.
 - ◊ **The scope and scale of this Project is too large.** The Proposed Action used computer modeling to depict changes in tree mortality pre vs. post-beetle epidemic. The model identified roughly 360,000 acres of National Forest System lands that could benefit from some type of treatment. The Proposed Action is based on resource needs only; not operational feasibility. Therefore, modifications to the Proposed Action could be warranted if analyses indicate unacceptable resource impacts could result from project implementation, at the scale currently proposed. Modifications would be identified in the Draft EIS and would be available for review and comment during the 45-day Draft EIS comment period.
 - ◊ **A range of alternatives is warranted for a project of this scope and scale.** The Forest Service is considering modifications to the Proposed Action to address this scoping issue rather than developing separate alternatives, as allowed for at 36 CFR 220.5(e)(1). Based upon input and discussion, the Proposed Action was modified after the July 2017 Scoping period to eliminate the 10 miles of permanent road construction previously proposed.
 - ◊ **Conduct treatment activities outside Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs) and Unroaded Areas.** We are currently developing project design features (PDCFs) to ensure protection of IRA characteristics/values and protection of areas that have minimal road systems. The PDC are being developed in conjunction with our Cooperating Agencies and will be available for public review during the 45-day Draft EIS formal comment period.
 - ◊ **Estimated temporary roads in the Proposed Action are too great.** While we have not reduced the amount of proposed temporary road miles, we have identified areas that exclude temporary road construction in specific Forest Plan Management Areas and created a new Treatment Opportunity Area (TOA) map. We are also developing PDC to minimize the effects of temporary roads on other resources and determining the value of running a Wetness Index model to display areas where temporary road building and landing construction could be problematic due to compaction and erosion issues.
 - ◊ **Public involvement opportunities to date.** We understand that some members of the public did not feel adequately notified about the formal scoping comment period for the Proposed Action. We are conducting public engagement sessions in January 2018 to increase public awareness and understanding of the project and are working with our Cooperating Agencies to identify future public engagement opportunities. Interested publics are encouraged to contact the Forest Service with concerns and input throughout the process. The next formal comment period associated with this project will be upon the Forest Service release of the Draft EIS (expected in May of 2018).
 - ◊ **Impacts to Recreation:** Project Design Features (PDFs) have been developed, in conjunction with Cooperating Agencies, to ensure protection of the recreation resource. The PDFs will be available for public review and comment during the 45-day comment period for the Draft EIS. The Forest has also developed the following indicators to measures potential impacts to the recreation resource from LaVA Project implementation.

Many of the **unresolved conflicts** identified above are broad in nature. As specific concerns are known, they will be addressed. The Forest Service will continue to work with stakeholder groups and our Cooperating Agencies throughout the analysis process to demonstrate responsiveness to the unresolved conflicts.





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Implementation Fundamentals

- The LaVA will be implemented in compliance with the Record of Decision for the Final Environmental Impact Statement. This is expected in December 2018.
- The LaVA is in compliance with all applicable direction in the 2003 Medicine Bow National Forest Plan and all applicable laws, regulations and policies.
- Treatments will be authorized for a 10-year period beginning in 2019 and will be completed within approximately 15 years of the project decision.
- Field analysis of specific sites will take place after the NEPA decision but before individual projects occur.
- Treatment acres will likely vary from year to year.

Tools to Guide Implementation (See LaVA Scoping Notice Page 6)

- A LaVA Implementation Guide (Part of the DEIS) will include:
 - ◊ Checklists – Several checklists will be followed and will be included in the DEIS for public review and comment. Examples of potential checklists include:
 - o A Pre-treatment checklist containing planning steps that will be followed for each LaVA Project which will detail specific annual public involvement with each project.
 - o A Supporting Document checklist where specialists sign off that necessary field surveys have been completed
 - o A law, regulation, and policy checklist to ensure that individual treatments are consistent with NEPA, the National Forest Management Act, Endangered Species Act
 - o An annual implementation checklist to ensure that individual projects, when added together, do not exceed treatment caps authorized by the decision
 - o A document compliance checklist to show requirements of the LaVA final environmental impact statement
 - ◊ Design Criteria – A list of project design criteria will be included in the DEIS for public comment. During project implementation, design criteria that are relevant to site-specific conditions will be identified and applied to each project. This will be part of the project record and available for public review and will be incorporated into the monitoring strategy.
 - ◊ Surveys - All required surveys will be completed for each individual treatment area prior to ground-disturbing activities.
- Monitoring - An annual monitoring plan will be part of the DEIS for public comment. This will include an opportunity to review implementation activities with interested stakeholders, partners, and collaborative groups to ensure treatments are implemented as planned and that project objectives are being attained.





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Acronyms Used with Project

Draft Environmental Impact Statement	DEIS
Environmental Impact Statement	EIS
Healthy Forests Restoration Act	HFRA
Inventoried Roadless Areas	IRAs
Landscape Vegetation Analysis	LaVA
Medicine Bow National Forest	MBNF
National Forest System	NFS
National Environmental Policy Act	NEPA
Project Design Criteria	PDC
Record of Decision	ROD
Sub-Analysis Units	SAUs
Treatment Opportunity Areas	TOAs

Project Timeline

January 2018	Public Engagement/Check-in Opportunity
May	Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for public review (45-day comment period)
June	Public Meetings for Draft EIS
September	Final EIS and <i>Draft</i> Record of Decision (ROD) for Objection (60 days total)
December 2018	Signed ROD and Project Implementation



More Information

- The Proposed Action document, maps, and other project information are available on the Forest web site at www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=51255
- For more information please contact District Ranger Frank Romero at (307) 745-2337 or feromero@fs.fed.us
- The next formal comment period for the LaVA Project is expected in May of 2018 with the release of the Draft EIS. The Forest Service will be hosting additional public involvement opportunities at that time.

